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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
2 MARCH 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
2 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

US Military Actions in North Vietnam

1. Early this morning, US and South Vietnamese aircraft carried out strikes against targets in southern North Vietnam. Hit in the strikes were port facilities in Quang Khe, approximately 15 miles north of Dong Hoi, and ammunition dumps in Xom Bang, just north of the Demilitarized Zone. First reports indicate that five US aircraft have been downed, but one pilot has been rescued from the Tonkin Gulf. One South Vietnamese plane is reported down.

Communist Military Developments

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5. No unusual Chinese Communist or Soviet military deployments have been detected in the past 24 hours.

Political Activity in South Vietnam

6. Premier Quat yesterday put his government on record as opposing any peaceful settlement until the Viet Cong cease subversive activities in South Vietnam and end infiltration from the North. He warned that the government was determined to take steps against Communist propaganda aimed at undermining the country's will to fight, but he distinguished between recent Buddhist proposals for ending the war and Communist front proposals asking for a ceasefire, or "false peace."

7. In separate conversations with US Embassy officials, both Thich Quang Lien, the monk heading the Buddhist peace campaign, and Thich Tri Quang stated that Lien's movement did not have support from the entire Buddhist hierarchy. Although it is possible that there are elements of Buddhist rivalries in the campaign, it seems likely that Quang, as in the past, will throw his weight behind Lien's movement if it gains momentum.

8. Ambassador Taylor has called the attention of the Quat government to US field adviser reports which in November indicated satisfactory progress in pacification in 17 of the 45 provinces, in December in 10 provinces, and in January in only 8 provinces. The deterioration is attributed to growing Viet Cong strength and sabotage activity, and political instability including urban disturbances. Premier Quat now states that his government is "rethinking" pacification organization and procedures, including mobilization, and that he may reshuffle at least his interior minister, who is not adequate for the job.

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Viet Cong Military Activity

9. Viet Cong military activity apparently continues at the slightly reduced level of recent days. Press reporting notes a Viet Cong mortar attack yesterday on an army bivouac in Phuoc Tuy Province, near the site of recent US jet bomber attacks. Viet Cong forces reportedly withdrew after firing 10 mortar rounds, killing one government soldier and wounding 11 others.

10. Latest reports from Saigon state that the vessel sunk last Saturday was a wooden river craft common to the Mekong River delta regions. Such craft are often sunk in areas controlled by the Viet Cong. The site of the sinking was a fishing village in a region which has long been a Viet Cong base. USMACV states an investigative operation to determine the ship's cargo does not appear to be warranted.

Communist Political Developments

11. Peiping propaganda calls for stronger resistance to US "war blackmail" in South Vietnam and reiterates its unyielding position on the possibility of negotiations.

12. A People's Daily editorial of 1 March charges that stepped-up US military action and threats of further escalation are designed to force the "South Vietnamese people" to agree to US peace terms. In an apparent reference to Premier Kosygin's guarded comments on negotiations of 26 February, the editorial implies that "certain people" who fear world war are cooperating with US attempts to compel a Communist backdown. Peiping asserts that the Chinese will "never succumb to US imperialist blackmail," and again demands complete US withdrawal from Vietnam.

13. In his speech at Leipzig yesterday, Premier Kosygin repeated the theme that US "aggression" against North Vietnam constitutes provocation against the entire socialist camp. He again warned the US that it would be a "grave miscalculation" to assume that these actions would remain unpunished. Kosygin, however, reaffirmed the USSR's commitment to peaceful coexistence and its intention to "work for the solution of international problems."

14. In an exchange with reporters, Kosygin apparently side-stepped a question regarding the effects of the Vietnam crisis on prospects for a visit to the Soviet Union by President Johnson. The Soviet Premier reportedly claimed that Moscow is awaiting a US reply to a Soviet message two months ago and indicated that the Soviet attitude toward a visit had not changed.

15. The Canadian ambassador in Moscow has reported another example of private Soviet efforts to inhibit US actions by exerting pressure on US allies. In a 23 February conversation with the ambassador, Mikhail Menshikov, former Soviet ambassador to the US and now RSFSR Foreign Minister, warned there is a real danger that if US pushed very much further, the North Vietnamese would react and the Chinese would be with them. He contended that Soviet differences with China would be submerged in such a showdown and cautioned against Western miscalculations on this point. Menshikov repeated several times that if North Vietnam becomes directly involved with US forces, the USSR will actively support the Communist side. In response to a direct question, however, Menshikov indicated Soviet support would be limited to supplying weapons to the North Vietnamese and Chinese who would do the fighting.

16. Soviet propaganda continues routine attacks on the US White Paper as an attempt to justify past and future "crimes" against North Vietnam. Peiping has characterized the White Paper as a "pretext for the US to extend the aggressive war in South Vietnam and to blackmail the DRV."

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